High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Network

FAQs

What is a HOT lane?

A HOT lane is a designated lane motorists driving alone can use if they pay a toll, allowing them to avoid traffic delays in the adjacent regular lanes

HOT lanes usually are combined with High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV or carpool) lanes that have enough capacity to handle more vehicles. Toll-paying drivers and toll-free carpools/vanpools share the lane, increasing the number of total vehicles using the HOV/HOT lane.

Why Consider HOT lanes?

The appeal of this concept is three-fold:

- It expands mobility options in congested urban areas by providing an opportunity for reliable travel times for HOT lane users;
- It generates a new source of revenue which can be used to pay for transportation improvements, including enhanced transit service; and
- It improves the efficiency of HOV facilities.

Why the need for a HOT Network in the Bay Area?

There are several gaps in the region's current HOV lane system. Filling these gaps would create a seamless network of unobstructed lanes to provide a faster commute for travelers who use them. MTC's 25-year Regional Transportation Plan indicates that these gaps cannot be filled with traditional existing revenues. The attached map shows what the proposed Bay Area HOT Network might look like.

What is the time frame for implementing the Bay Area HOT Network?

Implementation of the network would begin within the next five to 10 years; new federal and state legislation would be required. Legislation currently is pending to allow HOT lanes to be constructed on Interstate 680 over the Sunol Grade and in Santa Clara County.

Are HOT lanes a new concept?

No. HOT lanes have proved successful in California on State Route 91 in Orange County and on Interstate 15 in San Diego, as well as on Interstate 10 in Houston, Texas.

How does a HOT lane work?

Motorists usually enter and exit the lane at specific locations. An electronic reader identifies the vehicle from an in-vehicle transponder (FasTrak) and deducts the toll from a prepaid account.

How much does it cost to use HOT lanes?

Toll rates vary based on demand, and be can adjusted to maintain optimal traffic flow. As an example, tolls to use San Diego's eight-mile FasTrak express lanes generally vary from 75 cents to $4.00 (or 12 cents to 50 cents per mile) on a typical day.

What is the HOT lane revenue used for?

HOT lane revenue can be used to help pay off bonds issued to finance construction, provide for maintenance, operations and enforcement of the lanes, and to fund new or enhanced transit service.

Don't HOT lanes discourage ridesharing and transit use?
No. Drivers still will have a financial incentive to carpool in the express lanes. For example, carpooling in the Interstate 15 corridor in San Diego has increased 80 percent since 1996 when the conversion of HOV lanes to HOT lanes took place. Also, HOT lanes have the potential to improve transit travel times by ensuring access to relatively free-flowing travel lanes for commuter bus service, especially during rush hour.

I've heard HOT lanes referred to as "Lexus lanes" - don't they just benefit the rich?

A study done by Cal Poly San Luis Obispo of the State Route 91 HOT Lanes in Southern California found that "although roughly one-quarter of the motorists in the toll lanes at any given time are in the high income bracket, data demonstrate that the majority are low and middle-income motorists. The benefits of the HOT lane are enjoyed widely at all income levels."

The study also found that HOT lane use was more closely tied to current travel conditions and trip needs than income. HOT lanes really are a form of "congestion insurance" for any traveler willing to pay the toll – whether it is a businessperson late for a meeting or a parent racing to pick up a child at day care.

For more information on HOT lanes see:

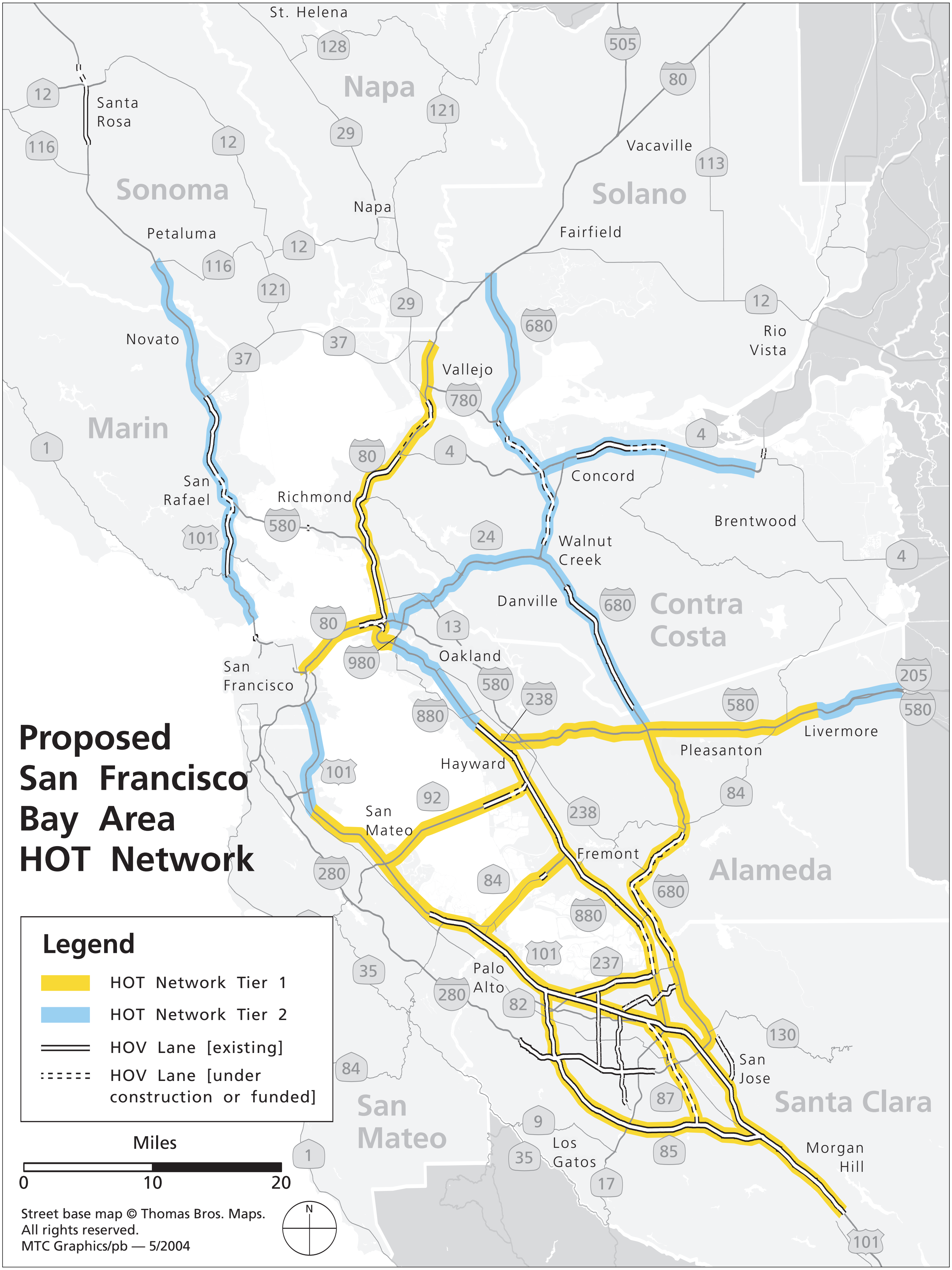
1. Web links to specific HOT lane facilities:

   San Diego, CA – Interstate 15: http://argo.sandag.org/fastrak//

   Orange County, CA – State Route 91: http://www.91expresslanes.com/

   Houston, TX – Northwest Freeway/Katy Freeway: http://www.quickride.org/about_quickride.stm

2. HOT Networks: A Plan for Congestion Relief and Better Transit (Reason Foundation)
   http://www.rppi.org/ps305.pdf


Proposed San Francisco Bay Area HOT Network
Legend
HOT Network Tier 1
HOT Network Tier 2
HOV Lane [existing]
HOV Lane [under construction or funded]
Miles
0
10
20
N
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MTC Graphics/pb — 5/2004
St. Helena
Santa Rosa
Sonoma
Petaluma
Novato
Marin
San Rafael
Napa
Vallejo
Vacaville
Solano
Fairfield
Rio Vista
Richmond
Concord
Walnut Creek
Brentwood
Danville
Contra Costa
Oakland
San Francisco
Hayward
Pleasanton
Livermore
San Mateo
Fremont
Alameda
Palo Alto
San Jose
Santa Clara
Los Gatos
Morgan Hill
12
116
128
505
80
121
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113
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